Ph.D. Research Synopsis

Doctoral Program in English Literature

"Eco Consciousness: A Study of the Select Works of Amitav Ghosh"

For
Submission to
LALIT NARAYAN MITHILA UNIVERSITY
Kameshwar Nagar, Darbhanga, Bihar

Supervisor

Dr. A. K. Singh
University Dept. of English
LNMU, Darbhanga
Bihar

Research Scholar

Tushar Mohan
PAT 2021-22
Roll no. E2207042
Ph.D. Course Work Roll no.04

Introduction

The rising scenario of climate disturbance is creating havoc on Earth. The unpredictable and detrimental changes in the seasons are becoming painful for human existence. Environmental degradation causes climate change, resulting in extreme weather events such as drought, hurricanes, rising sea levels, and a huge shortage of potable water. These changes compel the displacement of communities, causing climate-induced migration which is now a global concern. The adverse change in climatic conditions uproots and displaces large chunks of the human population and makes their life hellish. The anthropocentric approaches have added fuel to the fire and unbridled the exploitation of nature. If the present-day climate migration is left unaddressed, it will create humanitarian crises, undue strain on the resources, and geopolitical tensions.

The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) fifth assessment report says that if the planet warms up to 2 to 2.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level, the major parts of the world will turn unfit for habitation, and megacities like Mumbai and Tokyo will be submerged in water. By the year 2050, Africa and Asia will be the worst affected nation because of climate change. The catalytic consequences of environmental degradations are causing serious threat to the existence of the human and non-human. The limitless consumerisms of human have exploited the natural resources to the verge of ecological collapse. Ghosh interpret such change as 'uncanny', presenting the strange environmental conditions that is resulting the strangeness in ecological conditions."… in the tide country, where life was lived on the margins…no place was so remote as to escape the flood of history" (Ghosh, 2004). Through his aforementioned fiction and non-fiction writings, Ghosh attempts to explore global transformations occurring due to disruption in the environment. He also tries to explore new welcoming possibilities to adapt in order to save this earth. Regarding this context M.B Cole asses that the narratives of fiction that revolve around such issue of environment may be detached from policy making intricacies however, such narratives surely build up scopes for readers to look into imageries by which the masses will come to awareness. Ghosh in his non-fiction *The Great Derangement* says that future generations who will look back upon the Great Derangement will surely blame the leaders and politicians of this time over the failure to address these upheavals. However, he further adds the artists and writers will be equally responsible for their lack of imaginative possibilities which could bring radical changes in people thoughts.

This environmental crisis and trauma induced by it affects the physical and psychological well being of humans. For example, in recent days, Bangladesh has experienced the early effects of climate change, leading to climatic migration. These changes affect people's habitations, traditions, culture, cuisine, and attire as well. The situation of environmental degradation and climate change and its impacts on human beings and other life forms of earth are so compelling that it is like the ringing bell from the sinking ship. In recent decades policy makers of the world have shown serious concern and also taken some positive steps. However, it is not delivering the desired results. It is the high the high time the literature should also come forward to play its role in such scenarios.

It is a matter of satisfaction that in the initial years of 21st century Writers largely have acknowledged their literary and humanitarian duty to talk, write and make an overall atmosphere where people can be Eco Conscious. One such modern writer is Calcutta born Writer Amitav Ghosh. Born in India, a country known for its geographical and cultural diversity, and having travelled to different parts of the world, Ghosh enjoys the privilege of having first-hand experience of meeting different types of people who are politically, culturally and geographically divided and climatically tormented. This provided him a pan world perspective to depict the crisis in unique narrative style which is quite evident in his writings especially in the chosen works. In his fiction and non-fiction, Ghosh explores the problems of conserving biodiversity, distrusts materialistic forces that plunder the planet's natural resources. Like in The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable, in 2016, indicates his interest, at present, lies with the immediate need for sensitizing people of the problem of climate change. He feels it can be achieved only by the interaction between science and arts. In his interview with Naomi Oreskes, the American Historian, he affirms that, "science can give us the facts, but art and literature must narrate real stories of climate change". In his eco-critical writing, Ghosh delves into the challenges facing humanity in the era of the Anthropocene, the new geological period of time in which humans play a role in reshaping the planet and conserving it for future generations. He contends that humans as geological agents not only change the most basic physical processes of the Earth, but also that the Anthropocene presents a challenge not only to the arts and the humanities, but also to our commonsense understandings and beyond that to contemporary culture in general. In trying to understand why contemporary culture finds it hard to deal with climate change, Ghosh posits that "the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and that of the imagination. He warns the present generation of authors that in an ever-changing world with sea level rising to swallow the Sundarbans and the increasing possibility of submerged cities such as Kolkata, New York, and Bangkok, it is time to find new forms of art and literature that reveal the plight at hand.

Literature Reviews

Rachel Carson in her book Silent Spring (1962) gives a detailed account about the harmful impact

Of DDT and other pesticides on the Environment and how we are under the grip of a human-made crisis.

Mary Robinson in her book *Climate Justice (2018)* deals with the impact of climate change on the vulnerable society. This book contains a very pathetic story which tells deeply humane stories of ordinary people (mostly women) affected by climate change.

Famous Indian Environmentalist and Activist Vandana Shiva, in her book *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace* (2005) explores the concept like Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and other Indian social traditions which sees and considers earth as a family and all being have equal rights to sustenance through the gifts on the earth.

Maria Miles and Vandana Shiva in her book *Ecofeminism* (1993) explore the link between patriarchy and ecological degradation and also the link between global militarism and destruction of nature and the plight of women.

The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History (2000), the book written by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell presents a history of the relationship between people and their environments in the Mediterranean region over some 3,000 years.

The Nutmeg's curse: Parables for a planet in crisis (2021) in the Nutmeg's Curse, Ghosh recounts the conquest of the Banda Islands by the Dutch East India Company for nutmeg. This includes the massacre of the Bandanese people in 1621. He uses this as an analogy to discuss climate change and contemporary environmental issues.

The Great Derangement: climate change and the unthinkable (2016), a non-fiction by Amitav

Ghosh which examines our inability at the level of literature, history, and politics to grasp the violence of climate changes.

Eco precarity: Vulnerable Lives in Literature and Culture (2019) by Pramod K Nayar talks about the precarious life humans lead in the process and events of ecological disaster.

In his monumental work, *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard talks about how the most ecocritics would identify themselves as 'environmentalist'. He points out how in postmodern era the meaning of environment has changed. In the chapter entitled" Futures: The Earth", Greg points out how Ecocriticism oriented towards nature writing has led to urban and ecojustice revisionism, so much so that he finds it "more productive to think inclusively of environmentality as a property of any text."

On the other hand, Timothy Clark in his book *The Cambridge Introduction to literature and the Environment* refers to the degrading condition of environment impacts each one of us. He reflects literary and cultural criticism that concern environment. Both as a way of reading texts and as a theoretical approach of culture more generally 'ecocriticism' is a varied and fast changing set of practices which challenges inherited thinking and practice in the reading of literature and culture.

In the essay "The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World", Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus argues that politics that dealt with acid rain and smog can't deal with global warming. Society has changed, and our politicians have not kept up with these changes.

Primary Sources

The Hungry Tides (2004) is the fourth novel by Indian Author Amitav Ghosh. The novel is set in the Sundarbans, a unique and ecologically significant region in India and Bangladesh. The

work prompts readers to reflect on their relationship with the natural world and the urgent need for ecological consciousness observation. The three main characters Piyali Roy, Kanai Dutt and fokir navigate the tides of their own lives and they also face the ever-changing currents of the natural world around them.

Gun Island (2019), the realistic fiction novel by Amitav Ghosh deals with climate change and human migration the story follows a rare book dealer named Deen who becomes entangled in a series of mysterious events after encountering a legendary and mythical place called Gun Island. As the protagonist delves deeper into the legends, he grapples with the effects of climate change and the interconnectedness of human history.

Jungle Nama (2021), the graphic verse novel by Amitav Ghosh brings out the story of greed and ecological misadventure. Ghosh addresses the story to be an allegory for human caused climate change. The character Dukhey and Dhona portrays the humanly greedy nature. This brings us the idea of Need and Wants. As there are no limits to man's irrational desires. The poem-like style of the novel brings out the retelling of the traditional Bengali folk story of Bon Bibi and Dakkhin Rai the demon king.

The Living Mountain (2022), in his book The Living Mountain, Ghosh explains the relationship between humans and nature through the metafiction entailed by Manasi and her dream. Amitav Ghosh's The Living Mountain is an exemplary tale of how humans have exploited nature, leading to an environmental collapse. The work is intended to serve as a parable to illustrate a moral lesson on the value of indigenous knowledge that is closely related to people's immediate surroundings.

Research Questions

- Primary research question will be dealing with the findings of eco sensitivity of author and his consciousness towards environment while depicting the characters, plot and narration of select works.
- Secondly, why this consciousness in the modern writing is necessary for the literature to

play its role in fighting the formidable situation of Climate degradation.

- Finally, what are the impacts of these writing and depictions on mindset and behavior of People while interacting with the environment.

Aims and Objective

The irony of the situation is that the climate is degraded by humans and the consequences are also suffered by the humans. We have degraded up to such an extent that now it is now compelling us to act desperately. Climate change and environmental degradation comes with different sorts of social implications and challenges which are faced mostly by normal or less privileged people. My research will be primarily with the analysis of how the author in the selected text depicts consciousness and concern towards the environment and how this depiction has created awareness and change in the behavior of people while interacting with the environment.

This research also intends to look into and analyze the cause of environmental degradation and its consequences upon the mental, physical and emotional wellness of the people. Understanding the social aspects of climate degradation which can provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders in devising more effective and inclusive strategies to support these vulnerable populations and foster social cohesion in the face of increasing environment related problems.

Research Methodology

The proposed research is qualitative, i.e. the close textual analysis of the select texts will be done. The focus of the study will be on the narrative of the text. The approach will be primarily of the close treading of texts and linking them to related matters accordingly. My methodology will be to cover various texts related to my research objective.

The use of theories gives us the lens to look at the problem. The proposed study will use four theoretical frameworks for analyzing the texts. These are: “Deep Ecology” propounded by Arne

Naess," Mesh theory" by Timothy Morton, "Environmentalism of the Poor" by Joan Martinez Alier and Ramachandra Guha.

"Deep Ecology" is a type of ecologism that calls for a radical change in the relationship between humans and nature. It is an ecocentric, ecologically conscious idea which supports holism. It promotes the inherent worth of all living beings regardless of their instrumental utility to human needs. It talks about the complex relation in which the existence of organisms is dependent on the existence of others within the ecosystem.

"Mesh Theory" The concept by Timothy Morton the philosophy of ecological interconnectedness and its implication on the recent crisis on environment. His perspective challenges traditional notions of separateness and emphasizes the interdependence of all entities, whether human, non-human, organic, or inorganic.

"Environmentalism of the poor" talks about the challenges faced by poorer communities often stem from systemic issues like lack of access to clean water, air pollution, and limited resources. The marginalized and indigenous communities relying on natural resources of their livelihoods experience devastating consequences of environmental degradation.

TENTATIVE CHAPTER PLAN

1. Introduction
2. Eco Consciousness and The Hungry Tides
3. Environmentalism of The Poor and Gun Island
4. Mesh Theory and Jungle Nama
5. Deep Ecology and The Living Mountain
6. Conclusion

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

1. Introduction:

Introduction will be the largest part of the thesis. It will consist of the introduction to the topic along with the explanation of the key words in the title and the overview of the theoretical concept of Eco Criticism. This part of the thesis will also discuss the background and necessity for choosing the selected topic. It will also consist of background of writer and the select works along with the overall literary scenario from the select works belongs to.

2. Eco Consciousness and The Hungry Tides

The basic tenets of eco consciousness include the care and concern for the ecology in the mind of people which eventually get reflected into their behavior and action. In this chapter the given novel *The Hungry Tides* will be looked through this perspective and analyze *how* author depicted this through characterization of novel. Better naming of the chapter can be done at the later stage of the research.

3. Environmentalism of Poor and Gun Island

In this chapter the second select work i.e. *GUN ISLAND* will be analyzed according to the selected theoretical framework. In this novel the issue of migration due to harshness of climate and their repercussions on the people especially the less privileged people will also be analyzed.

4. Mesh Theory and Jungle Nama

This chapter will contain the points of Mesh Theory which was propounded by Timothy Morton, which primarily talks about the interconnectedness of all living beings. It will be better understood

after the close textual reading of the third select work i.e. *JUNGLE NAMA.* Chapter naming will be done later.

5. Deep Ecology and The Living Mountain

This chapter will be consisting the finding of the analysis of the fourth select work i.e. *THE LIVING MOUNTAIN* according to the selected theories. Better Chapter naming will be done later after analysis.

6. Conclusion

This will be the concluding portion of the thesis. Usefulness of this research on the society and impact on the general psyche of the people will also be discussed. And lastly references and

bibliography will be added.

Primary Sources

1. Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tides*, paperback, 2016
2. Ghosh, Amitav. Gun Island, paperback,2019
3. Ghosh, Amitav. *Jungle Nama,* paperback,2021
4. Ghosh, Amitav. The Living Mountain, paperback,2022

Secondary Sources

1. Clark Timothy, *The Cambridge Introduction to literature and the Environment.* Cambridge University Press, 2011
2. Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring* (1962), Mariner Books Classics, Paperback, 2022
3. Cole, Matthew Benjamin. "'At the heart of human politics': agency and responsibility in the contemporary climate novel." *Environmental Politics* 31.1 (2022): 132-151.
4. Garrard Greg, *Ecocriticism*. Routledge, 2023
5. Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: climate change and the unthinkable*, 2016
6. Ghosh, Amitav. The *Nutmeg's curse: Parables for a planet in crisis,* 2021
7. Horden, Peregrine. The *Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*,2000
8. Miles, Maria et.al. Ecofeminism, paperback,2010
9. Nayar, K, Pramod. *Ecoprecarity: Vulnerable Lives in Literature and Culture*.Routledge,2019
10. Robinson, Mary. *Climate Justice: Hope,Resilience,and the Fight for a sustainableFuture,* Bloomsbury publishing,2018
11. Shellenberger Michael, "The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World", *The Death of Environmentalism,* 2005
12. Shiva, Vandana. *Earth Democracy:Justice,Sustainability and Peace* , Penguin Random House,2021

Supervisor

Research Scholar